



# Parents FLAG Edmonton

March 1995

## NEXT MEETING:

TUESDAY, MARCH 21, '95

@ 7:30 pm

Gay & Lesbian Community Ctr.  
Rm 104, 11745 Jasper Ave.

Focus of this meeting: Parent & Family Concerns.

The steering committee for PFLAG Edmonton is aware that we are **not** adequately addressing parent and family concerns at our regular meetings. We apologize for this apparent lack of empathy. To correct this, in future most business will be dealt with at separate committee meetings. Copies of these meeting minutes will be available at our regular meetings, however.

## OUR MISSION

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG for short) promotes the health and well-being of lesbian, bisexual and gay persons, their families and friends through:

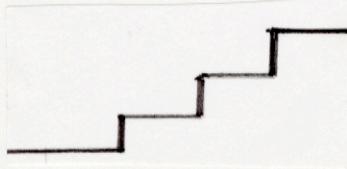
- \* **support**, to cope with an adverse society;
- \* **education**, to enlighten an ill-informed public; and



\* advocacy, to end discrimination and to secure equal civil rights.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays provides opportunity for dialogue about sexual orientation, and acts to create a society that is healthy and respectful of human diversity.

Those who participate are encouraged to do so at their own level of choice.



## PFLAG Edmonton HELPLINE

Lynne receives eight to ten calls monthly, most of them being what might be termed "closet" calls. These are from lesbian and gay people of all ages who are seeking advice on how to "come out" to their parents. However when children come out of their closet, typically their parents go into the "closet". Lynne receives numerous calls from distraught parents and other relatives who are confused as to how to begin to open the doors of their newly-discovered closets. With much compassion Lynne gives these callers hours of her time and much helpful advice.

Lynne says she has found her work on the helpline to be tremendously rewarding.

## SUPPORT: A Gay Young Man

### Writes His Mom

Dear Mom,

This is the hardest letter I've ever had to write. The difficulty lies in the fact that I love you very much and would never intentionally hurt you. But unintentionally, I have been hurting us both by not being completely honest about who I am.



What I'm no longer afraid to tell you is that I'm gay. I'm telling you this because I'm tired of pretending to be someone I'm not, tired of wasting the enormous amounts of energy it takes to be the fictitious Peter, afraid someone would find out. The toll of that lying has been far too great.

I am finally free, I am a good person, and I am gay. I know now that the two aren't mutually exclusive, and my hope is that you will come to know that too. Being gay is not something that was done to me, nor is it something I need to be cured of, because "cure" implies that I'm sick, and I am not sick. I'm still the same Peter, just being more open and honest about who I really am.

For many parents, the initial reaction to finding their child is gay is to try to place blame, either on themselves or on someone else. Please know that being gay is part of who I am, natural for me, like my blue eyes or size 13 feet.

Until now, the biggest part of who I am was locked deep inside of me—the ability to really love someone and be loved by them, to feel the warmth and security, the special companionship that comes from being in relationship with someone special. But for me it won't be with a woman, it will be with a man. And I'll be the happiest man in the world if, when I find that, I'll also have a mom that loves me even more than she did before.

**In the future, when you say you love me, as I hope you will, I'll know that you love the real Peter, and that you're proud of me for who I really am, and trust me to live the life that is just and right for me.**

I am sharing this with you because we both deserve more out of our relationship than empty

conversations about the weather. I am offering you a gift: the gift of being your son, Peter, who loves you very much. In return, all I ask of you is to please try to keep an open mind and an open dialogue, because the more we talk, the greater will be our understanding.

I love you,

Peter

*The above letter was read to the National PFLAG '94 Conference by Peter (through tears).*

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### EDUCATION:

#### SERVING IN SILENCE

*Serving in Silence: The Margarethe Cammermeyer Story* is now available from PFLAG Edmonton's video library. A docudrama it tells the story of Cammermeyer's discharge from the American National Guard in 1992 after disclosing that she was gay.

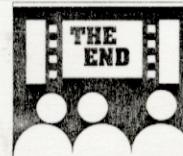
Glen Close plays the colonel and Judy Davis plays her companion. Ms. Close is also a co-producer and Neil Meron is executive producer. The big name behind this movie is Barbra Streisand, who is producing this movie and who along with others convinced Col. Cammermeyer that "it was not my story, but the story of thousands of others who have served in the military; women in subservient roles trying to come to terms with who they

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are, especially when it may not fit into preconceived ideas of who we are".

Despite criticism and protests from family groups objecting to the lesbian relationship producers were not pressured by NBC to edit a kiss out of the film and full sponsorship was received from advertisers.

In appreciation PFLAG Edmonton has sent a letter of congratulations to CFRN-TV which aired the movie here in Edmonton. We encouraged CFRN-TV to air further such docudramas about lesbian, bisexual and/or gay individuals and offered to be involved with them in future programs to express how we as parents feel.



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### ST. DAVID'S GAY STUDY

St. David's Anglican Church meets every Wednesday night at 7:00 pm to study homosexuality in a Christian context. Speakers include lesbians, gays, their parents, the Anglican bishop, etc.

Four parents from PFLAG Edmonton spoke at the Feb. 8th meeting to a receptive and supportive audience.

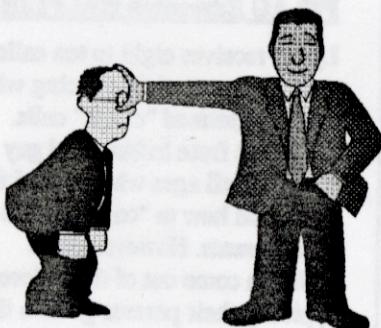
For information on other churches which may be offering this study/discussion course please phone 469-7530.



The following three articles are excerpts from the Toronto Board of Education's pamphlet, "HOMOPHOBIA": (It comes to us, along with several other printed articles, courtesy of Mary, a PFLAGer in Brampton, Ontario.)

### FORMS OF HOMOPHOBIA

There are four distinct but interrelated forms of homophobia: personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural.



**Personal Homophobia** is prejudice based on a personal belief that lesbian, gay and bisexual people are sinful, immoral, sick, inferior to heterosexuals or incomplete women and men.

Personal homophobia is experienced as feelings of fear, discomfort, dislike, hatred or disgust with same-sex sexuality. Anyone regardless of their sexual orientation or preference can experience personal homophobia; when this happens with lesbian, gay and bisexual people, it is called internalized homophobia.

Like heterosexuals, lesbian, gays and bisexuals are taught that same-sex sexuality is inferior to heterosexuality, and many internalize this to the point where self-acceptance is difficult. They accept the stigma attached to being lesbian, gay or bisexual without

realizing that their experience is the result of oppression. One result of this is that some lesbians, gays and bisexuals carefully conceal their identity; others try desperately to deny or change their sexual orientation; and some have tried or succeeded in committing suicide.

**Interpersonal Homophobia** is individual behavior based on personal homophobia. This hatred or dislike may be expressed by name-calling, telling "jokes", verbal and physical harassment and other individual acts of discrimination.

Interpersonal homophobia in its extreme results in lesbians, gays and bisexuals being physically assaulted for no other reason than their assailants' homophobia. Most people act out their fears of lesbian, gay and bisexual people in non-violent, more commonplace ways. Relatives often shun their lesbian, gay and bisexual family members; co-workers are distant and cold to lesbian, gay and bisexual colleagues; heterosexual friends aren't interested in hearing about their lesbian, gay and bisexual friends' relationships.



**Institutional homophobia** refers to the many ways in which government, businesses, churches and other institutions and organizations discriminate against people on the basis of sexual orientation. Institutional

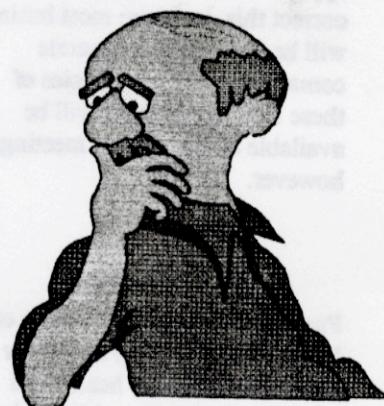
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homophobia is also called heterosexism.

Institutional homophobia is reflected in religious organizations which have stated or implicit policies against lesbians, gays or bisexuals leading services; agencies which refuse to allocate resources for services to lesbian, gay and bisexual people; and governments which fail to insure the rights of all citizens, regardless of their sexual orientation.

**Cultural Homophobia** is spelled out each day in television shows and print advertisements where virtually every character is heterosexual, every erotic relationship involves a female and a male and every "normal" child is presumed to be attracted to and will eventually marry someone of the other sex. In the few cases where lesbian, gays or bisexuals are portrayed they are usually unhappy, stereotyped, engaged in self-destructive behaviors or ambivalent about their sexual orientation.

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### WHAT ARE THE CAUSES OF HOMOPHOBIA?

**Personal homophobia** (prejudice) is primarily caused by misinformation. As with racism and sexism, people are taught to be homophobic. Myths about



lesbian, gay and bisexual people are perpetuated in our society despite the availability of accurate information. Few children are given any unbiased information about lesbian, gay and bisexual people; many adults continue to believe the stereotypes they learned as children; and some religious and conservative organizations promote lies about lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

**Interpersonal homophobia** (harassment and individual discrimination) can be explained by considering psychological factors in conjunction with prejudice. People who are not comfortable with their own sexuality or who feel threatened by same-sex sexuality tend to be more rigid about what is sexually "right" and may try to punish or force their beliefs on lesbian, gay and bisexual people.

**Institutional homophobia** is caused in part by competition for power. Societies such as ours create scapegoats to maintain the status quo and the positions of those in power. During this century, groups such as Jews, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latin Americans, North American Indians, women and lesbian, gay and bisexual people have all in turn been blamed for a variety of social and economic problems. When scapegoating is successful, dominant groups don't need to take responsibility for injustice or give up privilege.

**Cultural homophobia** is largely caused by social norms which dictate "correct" sexuality. Sexual contact between women, and between men, has been practiced in all societies throughout history (over 4,500,000 years) and is openly accepted in many cultures. Western civilization is generally

repressive of sexuality in any form other than intercourse necessary for procreation or sexual activity in the context of heterosexual marriage. Therefore, same-sex sexuality will certainly be feared or damned.

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#### HOW CAN HOMOPHOBIA BE CURED ?

Homophobia is pervasive in this and many other societies. Because we are all products of our society most of us are homophobic, regardless of our sexual orientation. Assume that you are homophobic.

Dealing constructively with homophobia first requires an acknowledgment of its pervasive existence. We cannot easily eradicate our homophobic feelings but if we are willing to acknowledge that we are all homophobic, then we can begin to take responsibility for our choices and change our behaviors.

In addition to assuming the everpresence of homophobia we can do the following:

**Identify** homophobia, not homosexuality, as the problem to be addressed. In conversations with friends and colleagues speak out about homophobia.

**Think** about the similarities and differences between homophobia and other forms of oppression. Use what you know about racism, sexism, classism, etc. to better understand homophobia and to

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look for ways to respond to homophobia.

**Listen** to the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual people and assume that their experience with oppression is valid. Similarly assume that the ways in which lesbian, gay and bisexual people experience the world are different from the ways in which heterosexuals experience the world.

**Actively support anti-discrimination efforts, as well as campaigns to stop homophobic prejudice and violence.**

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## ADVOCACY

### THANKYOU'S

\* A thankyou to alderperson Michael Phair for copying and passing a PFLAG newsletter on to a parent who has contacted his office a few times. We welcome this person to our monthly meetings if she/he should wish to attend.

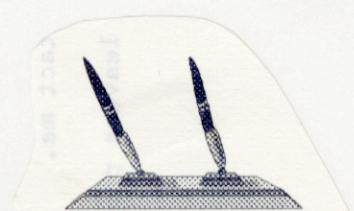
We also thank Michael for correcting an *Edmonton Journal* article which was reprinted in our newsletter stating that the City of



Edmonton provides employee benefits for same-sex couples. As Michael says, "sadly, that is untrue, but we're working on it! Should any of your contacts be employees of the City of Edmonton, Edmonton Telephones or Edmonton Power, they should let their unions know that they want to have this benefit. If people are not "out" they should send a letter to our Diversity Officer, Peter Fernandes, asking that he pass the request on to the appropriate persons while guarding the requester's anonymity.

Our City does, however, have a policy that prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation in hiring and access to civic services."

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\*PFLAG Edmonton would also like to thank the following persons who have responded to our Jan 25, '95 advocacy letter re Bill C-41 (which would include sexual orientation, along with colour, race, nationality, religion, age, gender and physical and mental disability as categories for additional protection under Canadian law.):

- Svend Robinson, MP (a letter of thanks and support);
- Anne McLellan, MP & Minister of Natural Resources ( a letter of thanks and support);
- Hon. Jean Chretien, PM ( a letter of thanks)
- Roseanne Skoke, MP (a letter of acknowledgment)

- As yet no replies have been received from MPs Hugh Hanrahan, David Kilgour or Preston Manning.

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\* A letter of thanks, on behalf of PFLAG Edmonton, was sent to CFRN-TV congratulating them for airing *Serving in Silence: The Margarethe Cammermeyer Story*. A video of this film, co-directed by Barbara Streisand, is available from our PFLAG library.

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\* THANKYOU to all those (43) who signed the letter to Ralph Klein expressing our opposition to the government's plan to appeal Justice Anne Russell's decision in favour of Delwin Vriend. The letter also demanded speedy enshrinement of protection for homosexuals in Alberta's Individual's Rights Protection Act.

Copies of this letter, with signatures, are being sent to MLA's Gary Mar, Grant Mitchell, and Betty Hewes; to Charlach MacKintosh, Chief Commissioner of the Alberta Human Rights Commission; and to GALA (Gay & Lesbian Awareness Association)

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\* A BIG Thankyou! to Noreen Marshall, Regional Director for the Canadian and Northwest Territories Human Rights Commission, who spoke to our February meeting. This included her involvement with the Alberta Human Rights Commission, GALA (Gay & Lesbian Awareness), IAA (Interfaith Association on Aids), Edmonton Police Gays Liaison Committee, and the Volunteer Centre.

Noreen says she averages about 200 complaints/year, mostly re family and spousal status from

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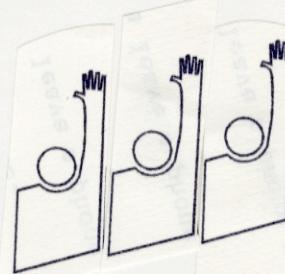
people who are well "out" of the closet; very few complaints are received from Alberta!

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### COMPLAINTS

\* Lynne sent a letter of complaint to radio station CHQT to protest offensive remarks made by Bob Bradburn re gays being unacceptable as "Big Brothers". We will publish CHQT's reply when it is received.

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### VOLUNTEERS NEEDED !!!

\* MARCH 5 - 7:30 pm Knox United Church study on homosexuality; two parents needed to tell their "stories".

\* MARCH 12 - 2:00 pm, Sunday. Prime Timers, gay men 40+ years. Two parents needed to give info on PFLAG Edmonton. Other lesbian, gay and bisexual groups will be invited.

\* MARCH 18 - GALA is hosting a "PINK TANK" to facilitate communication and networking among lesbian, bisexual and gay groups. This function will be held at City Hall, Heritage Room, 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. Free lunch is promised to the first 40 attendees!

\* MARCH 22 - 7:30 pm McKernan Elementary-Junior High School Parent Teacher Association meeting. Four or five



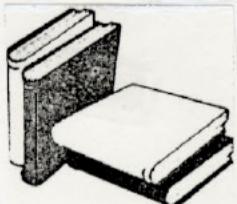
parents needed to tell their "stories".

\* APRIL 29 - 9:00 am to noon. Four or five parents needed to talk to child and family care workers, school counselors, etc. at Grant McEwan Community College.

\* APRIL 29 - Edmonton Vocal Minority concert. Six to eight volunteers are needed to pass out programs, to usher, and to take care of the "pamphlet" table. Free admission to the concert and a half-page free ad for PFLAG in the program will be given in return!

\* EVERY MONDAY during winter session OUTREACH (formerly GALOC) meets at Athabasca Hall in the Heritage Lounge from 6:00 to 7:00 pm. There is an informal standing invitation from OUTREACH members to PFLAG members to attend. Just drop in; you'll be welcome! OUTREACH members who are not very "out" benefit greatly from the support of a PFLAG parent. Please plan to attend when you can!

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### ON THE BOOKSHELF

As parents of gay children we have been confronted by the news that our children are "different". Whilst they may have been aware of this since childhood or their teen years, the revelation could come as a shock to us. In any case we are forced to reorganize our concepts and our traditional beliefs

"Times are a'changing" so we may need more knowledge to cope with

our situation. *Brain Sex* (by Anne Moir and David Jessel, Mandarin Books, 1994) a survey of state-of-the-art research explains the following in layman's language and easy to read format:

- \* effects of hormonal, genetic and environmental factors on fetal sexual development;

- \* how a child may receive a "brain sex" different from its anatomical gender;

- \* possible biological origins of homosexual and bisexual orientations as well as hermaphrodites and transvestites.

The paperback edition of this valuable book sells for only \$7.99!

by Ernie

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### EVENTS CALENDAR

#### LIATRIS SOCIETY

\*March 11 - Can't wait for Spring? Let's meet at the Muttart Conservatory at 11:00 AM and get rid of those late winter blues. Admission is \$4.00. Coffee and refreshments are available in the cafeteria. Everyone welcome!

\* April 01 - Spring is in the air and some early blooming native plants are beginning to flower. Meet at [REDACTED] at 1:30pm for a walk in the Kinnaird Ravine. (Info: [REDACTED] Brent)

\* April 30 - Crocuses at Redwater Sandhills. Meet at [REDACTED] St. at 9:00 am. (Info: [REDACTED] Richard)

### **Parents FLAG Edmonton**

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#### ALBERTA SINGS OUT!

Convocation Hall, U of A

Saturday, April 29, '95

8:00 pm

Join Edmonton Vocal Minority for an evening as we perform with our guests:

- \* The Rocky Mountain Singers, Calgary;

- \* Bridge City Chorus, Saskatoon;

- \* Over the Rainbow Community Singers, Calgary;

- \*Unitas, Edmonton;

and various other individuals from across Northern and Central Alberta.

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4th Annual

#### GREAT HUMAN RACE

8km Run & 3km Fun Walk

Sunday, April 30, '95

10:00 am

Students' Union Bldg, U of A

114 St & 89 Ave

For Registration & Information:

Volunteer Centre: 482-6431

Caring hearts make the great human race a success!

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Seen in WOMONSPACE NEWS:

"It's those two new girls on the block, Harold, something about the way they walk, something about the way they talk...something about the way they look...at each other...Harold, I could swear they're Lebanese!"



# It's A Gay Life!

March 1995

## MICA ENGLAND

*We must begin to stop the hatred within our own spheres of influence. Hatred and negativity will cause our destruction.*

Standing before the Dallas City Council in July 1989 as they considered a resolution in support of the students in China fighting for democracy, Mica England held up an equal employment opportunity poster and demanded justice: "I responded to an advertisement for Dallas police officers in the Tulsa Oklahoma World. Before recruiters invited me to Dallas to take the examination, I told them I am gay," England said to the Council. "But when I arrived they refused to let me take the test because I openly and willingly admitted that I am gay. Why is there no democracy for me in Dallas?"

England's pointed remarks totally disrupted the meeting. One council member demanded the city attorney provide legal basis for the police department's exclusionary ban, and the mayor tried to save face by hastily adjourning the meeting. Another council member asked, "Is this resolution in support of all Chinese students or only the hereosexual ones?" In the uproar, one thing was clear: the Council had no intention of dealing with the issue publicly. But England sued in 1990, and the Council was forced to hold a public hearing in

January 1992. Lasting until 2:30 am with six hundred people in



attendance, the meeting was angry and emotionally charged. Conservative and religious groups put homophobic slogans and banners all around the room, even placing *No Homo Cops* badges on infants.

The Council voted to continue the hiring ban on gays and lesbians. But weeks after the hearing, England won her lawsuit. The court ruled that the rationale for refusing to hire gay and lesbian officers (The Texas homosexual sodomy law) was unconstitutional, and ordered the Dallas Police Department to allow England to apply for a position. It was a much

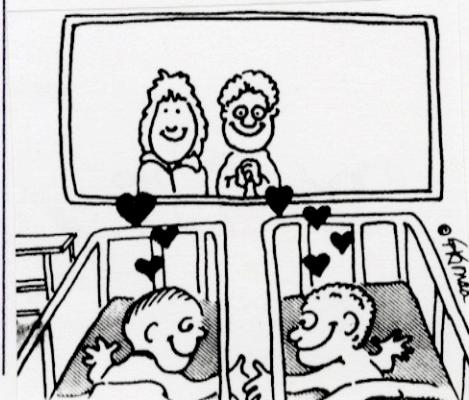
## GAY ACTIVIST

larger victory than anyone had anticipated. When five gay and lesbian Texans later sued successfully to overturn the state's homosexual sodomy law, the Texas Supreme Court refused to hear the state's appeal, citing England's case as precedent.

Mica England had one desire: she had wanted to be a police officer. Although she used her hard-won legal victory, and applied for a position on the force, she later realized the court case had made her too famous, and her effectiveness would be compromised. Sadly, she abandoned the dream that had set her on her trail-blazing path. But in her single-minded determination to reach a personal goal, England had made Texas history. That's no small thing.

*I am very impressed with Mica. She's a real fighter and I'm glad she won her case.*

--Larry King



**REFLECTIONS****from AGAPE**

by Tim

**Bible passages:**

I Samuel 18:1

II Samuel 1:26

Ruth 1: 16

These passages may be seen as depictions of same-sex love in the Bible. I look forward to that day when from any pulpit we may hear a sermon on the love of Jonathan and David, and Ruth and Naomi, instead of a diatribe against us. But until then I have many questions:

Will the Church stop using the Bible to bash people? Will the Religious Right destroy the Cistine Chapel in Rome, and all those portraits of the Last Supper, because Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci were gay? Will the Church stop making an idol out of the Bible? Will the Church not see the parallels of how the Bible has been used to support slavery and apartheid, oppress First Nations peoples and keep women down? Will we hear a message of love, justice and embracing the exile? - or if not, what is going to happen to this Church?!

We have a long journey ahead. We must find strength in our search for justice. Let us remember how things have changed. Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Greenland now have same-sex marriages. Amnesty International now campaigns on behalf of people experiencing persecution because of their sexual orientation. Most Canadian provinces now include sexual orientation in their human rights codes.

Finding my voice to speak out against the forces of homohatred,

homophobia, and heterosexism is not easy.



I leave you with the words of Audre Lorde, an African lesbian, poet and prophet who died in 1993:

*I have come to believe over and over again that what is most important to me must be spoken, made verbal and shared, even at the risk of having it bruised or misunderstood....And I remind myself all the time now that if I were to have been born mute, or had maintained an oath of silence my whole life long for safety, I would still have suffered and I would still die... We can sit in our corners mute forever while our sisters and ourselves are wasted, while our children are distorted and destroyed, while our earth is poisoned; we can sit in our safe corners mute as bottles, and we will still be no more or less afraid... I was going to die, if not sooner, then later, whether or not I had ever spoken myself, my silences had not protected me. Your silence will not protect you.*

Editor's Note: Agape is the Greek word for love. It is used here to denote the annual gathering of lesbian and gay people from three churches - Lutheran, Anglican and Catholic - to celebrate their orientation and to worship God through the sharing of fellowship, dinner and a common church service. Five PFLAG members responded to the open invitation to attend and were delighted to be in such good company!

**It's A Gay Life!****INTERFAITH ASSOCIATION****ON AIDS**

"People of faith working together to provide a positive response to HIV"

The IAOA seeks to work within all faith communities. At the time of this publication IAOA has members from, or involvement with, the following faith traditions:

**Buddhist** - Tibetan and Shin

**Christian** - Anglican, Baptist, Christian Reform, Lutheran, Metropolitan Community Church, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Orthodox, United

**Jewish** - Conservative and Reform

**Hindu**

IAOA has trained speakers who are available to come to faith communities to provide information on HIV. Topics include: basic HIV-AIDS information; psychosocial issues; and how to support a person infected/affected by HIV in your community.

For further information, or to make a donation, please phone: 448-1768.

homework  
cartoon